

## Recollections of the Early Settlement of Northwestern Iowa (pt. 13)

N. Levering

ISSN 0003-4827

Material in the public domain. No restrictions on use.

---

### Recommended Citation

The Annals of Iowa, 10(4) (Oct. 1872): 261-267

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

So they smeared the palms of his hands with blacking, and then proceeded to tickle his face with a straw; this was sure to bring one or both of his hands in contact with his face, with a wipe intended to expel the flies. And this process was continued until the ruddy face of the sleeper had assumed a complexion equal, in glossy blackness, to that of any African.

At last Charlie awoke, and was greeted by many suppressed remarks about his appearance. Unconscious and incredulous of anything wrong, he was told to look in the glass and see for himself. This he did; yet scarcely awake, and bewildered by the appalling reflection, he hardly knew whether he was himself or somebody else, and gave expression to his bewilderment thus: "Ah, Charley Hamlin, you came within two votes of going to the legislature—now here you are, in Red Rock, a nigger!"

---

## RECOLLECTIONS OF THE EARLY SETTLEMENT OF NORTHWESTERN IOWA.

---

BY N. LEVERING, GREENWOOD, MO.

---

*(Continued from page 122.)*

IN the spring of 1863, the Sixth Regiment Iowa Cavalry, commanded by Col. D. M. Wilson, of Dubuque, was ordered by Gen. Pope (who had command of the northwestern military department) to Sioux City, preparatory for a vigorous campaign against the Indians, during the summer. They were quartered at what was called Camp Cook, near the mouth of Big Sioux river, on the Dakota side. The camp was named Cook, in honor of Gen. Cook, of Springfield, Illinois, who was placed in command of the expedition. The General and staff arrived some weeks previous to the troops. On the evening of his arrival, he took rooms at the Warren.

gan House, and soon after a large number of the citizens of the town assembled in front of the hotel to pay their respects to the General, who was, immediately on his arrival, buttonholed by some favor-seekers who froze to him so firmly that he was not permitted to respond to the many loud and lusty calls made for him by the populace in the street. Jimmie Dormidy, a son of Erin (before spoken of), when he found the General would not put in an appearance, raised the floodgates of passion, and let his indignation flow copiously. Said he, "Now gentlemen, if Gen. *Kook* will not spake, I will. We have assembled here to welcome Gen. *Kook* to our town, and he trates us wid contempt; by George he is no *gintleman*, so he isn't; I love you *bays*, every one of you, and would cut myself up into mince mate for ye, so I would, if it was necessary to save year lives, but Gen. *Kook* is no *gintleman*." After Jimmie had made some grand flourishes of oratory, he gently collapsed into a more calm and mild tone, and said, "No *bays*, let us all go home and let not a mother's son of ye salute or spake to him when ye mate him on the strate."

Not long after the General's arrival, he visited Fort Randal and other points of the river, paying a visit to the Yanktown Sioux agency. While there his conduct was reported as not being very commendable, and was severely criticised by John Currier, editor of the *Sioux City Register*. This so incensed the General, that he determined to vindicate his honor in a soldier-like manner. Meeting Mr. C. soon after at his boarding house, the General, without much ceremony, proceeded to give him a severe pummeling. The General was declared the victor, but was badly demoralized; in the engagement he broke one or more of his fingers. This kind of fighting, as well as inefficiency to command the expedition, was not what Maj. Gen. Pope had contracted for, and the result was, Gen. Cook was soon after superceded by Brig. Gen. Sully, who was eminently fitted to command the expedition, having been on the war path several years under Harney, he was familiar with Indian warfare, and the

country in which he had to fight them. On his arrival, he at once set about arranging business for an active campaign, and was greatly assisted by his staff, who were very efficient officers, rendered so from their long service in the army of the Potomac. They were Capt. Pel, Capt. King, and Lieut. Levering. The Second Regiment Nebraska Cavalry, under command of Col. Furnace, was added to Sully's command. All things being ready, the expedition left Camp Cook about the 1st of June, for the country of the hostile Indians, on the upper Missouri river, in Dakota territory.

In the latter part of June, a captain in the regular army, and a topographical engineer (whose name I now have forgotten), and who was accompanying the expedition for scientific purposes, while in advance of the army a half mile or more, searching for natural curiosities with which the country abounded, was attacked by two Indians who crept upon and shot him, killing him almost instantly. He had often been cautioned by Gen. Sully not to get too far out from the army, as there were Indians following up the expedition for the purpose of picking off straggling soldiers; the Captain replied that he had gone through too many tight places to be killed now by an Indian's bullet. On hearing the firing, a squad of men were at once dispatched to the place where they found the Captain dead. The Indians having fled chase was immediately given, and the murderers soon overhauled and sent to their new hunting grounds; their bleeding scalps were soon lying at the feet of Gen. Sully, who said he was not yet satisfied, he must have their heads. The soldiers returned with an ambulance to where the lifeless bodies of the enemies lay, and with their swords soon performed the work of decapitation. Their bleeding and gastly heads were soon placed at the disposal of the General, who ordered them placed on poles and stuck up in the trail where the Indians traveled, that others might look upon them and expect a similar fate. The loss of the Captain was much regretted by all of his brother officers and soldiers; he was, if I am

correct, a native of Germany; he was an accomplished gentleman in every sense of the term, a polished scholar and a brave man. He had seen much hard service on the bloody Potomac, but was destined to bow to the bullet of the merciless savage. His body was laid away in its final resting place, in as comfortable a condition as circumstances would permit, in a dreary and desolate waste, far from loving hearts that cruel distance forbade the cherished privilege of dropping a tear on his lonely grave. There let him rest, while his many virtues and his heroic conduct will long live in the hearts of his admiring fellow soldiers, who will recount with pride his devotion to his adopted country.

"He has fought his last fight,  
He sleeps his last sleep."

Gen.<sup>y</sup> Sully kept up a continuous and incessant search for the hostile bands. After many hard and dreary days march over burning sands and beneath a scorching sun, without much hope of encountering the lurking foe, when about the 1st of September, while on a march, they discerned an object on the side of a bluff some considerable distance off, which, on bringing a glass to bear on it, was discovered to be a human being. A squad of men were at once sent out to bring him in. On arriving there it was found to be a decrepid old Indian, by the name of Kegg, who was well known to all the early settlers of Sioux City. The old man had been deserted by Little Crow's hostile band, with whom he had been traveling, on account of his inability to keep up with them. The old man was in a starving condition, having been left without food, or the means of obtaining it, save a butcher knife, with which he had made a small excavation in the side of a bluff, where he slept at night. The only article of food he possessed was a portion of a snake which he had been subsisting upon. One of the soldiers took from his haversack some hard-tack, and gave it to the old man, who devoured it ravenously, exclaiming, "wash-ta-do"—very good. After the gnawing pangs of hunger had been satisfied, he became very communicative, and

offered his services to "big chief"—Gen. Sully,—to pilot him to Little Crow's band, which he said numbered about 1,500 lodges. He was carried to Gen. Sully, whom he knew, and informed the General, through an interpreter, which direction the Indians had taken, and that he would find them at one of two places. Taking their trail, he piloted them to the first place, but without finding them. The old Indian then said they would be found at White Stone Hill. Gen. Sully now pushed forward as rapidly as possible, in order to overtake them before they should leave there. On the morning of September 3rd, when nearing the place, the scouts returned and reported the enemy there, camped in a ravine, and not suspecting any danger, and that they were about 1,500 lodges strong. The General was some distance in the rear. Col. Wilson, being the senior officer, assumed command, and ordered Col. Furnace to bring up the Nebraska Second on one side of the ravine in which the enemy were camped, the battery at the mouth of the ravine, while he brought up the Iowa Sixth on the opposite side, forming a triangle, and completely surrounding the enemy, who were much surprised on finding themselves thus encircled and cut off. Seeing no hope for escape, Little Crow resorted to a strategic movement that would have done credit to a yankee. He requested a big talk with the big chief, which Col. Wilson granted. The Indian chiefs assembled and proposed a treaty. It was now about three o'clock p. m. Gen. Sully had not yet arrived. The treaty partly continued until near dark, when the Nebraska Second became impatient on observing the movements of the enemy, who were assiduously engaged in packing their ponies and Esquimaux dogs, of which they had a large supply. This labor was performed mostly by the squaws, while the warriors kept a vigilant watch of every movement made by the troops. It was now evident that their object was to continue their treaty propositions until night, when they hoped to make their escape under the cover of darkness. This being apparent, Col. Furnace could not restrain his men, who made

a precipitous charge upon the enemy, who returned the fire, and broke through the lines of the Iowa Sixth, but not without some loss in killed and prisoners. The smoke from the firing, added to the coming shades of night, soon rendered it impossible to distinguish an Indian from a soldier. The troops camped upon the field, and cared for the dead and wounded, as far as they were able for the intense darkness. When morning came, our loss was ascertained to be thirteen killed, and about twenty wounded (the exact number not now remembered). Among the killed was First Lieut. Levett, acting Adjutant Sergt. James Rogers, and private John Kelsey, Co. E (the other names not now remembered). After our troops had retired for the night, the Indians, under cover of the extreme darkness, crept back upon the battle field, and carried off their dead and wounded as many as they were able to find, so that their losses could not be definitely ascertained. In their search for their dead and wounded, they scalped our dead, and killed all our wounded that they chanced to find. Among their victims was Lieut. Levett, who was severely wounded and unable to get into camp. He was an excellent young officer, who evinced much of that peculiar tact and ability that is requisite for a military officer, and was fast rising in the esteem and confidence of his superior officers. By the bloody hands of a merciless and savage foe, he filled a soldier's grave in the bloom of manhood, and in the hey-day of life, loved and mourned by all who knew him. The next morning, September 14th, the enemy presented a very demoralized appearance. The country for some distance around, was covered with poneys and dogs, some packed and others partially so, some huge dogs were running to and fro with papposes lashed to their backs. The battle ground was literally covered with blankets, robes, kettles, and Indian paraphernalia of every description. Among the many things picked up, were silver spoons, with the owner's name engraved thereon, together with many other household goods which they had robbed settlers of. Gen. Sully now ordered

all the tepes and other goods belonging to the enemy collected together in one pile and burned. The vast number of ponies were divided out among the soldiers. The Indians were now completely routed and scattered in every direction. This was a severe blow to them, so completely crippling them, that no further trouble was apprehended from them that season.

Gen. Sully returned to Sioux City with his forces, where the Iowa Sixth went into winter quarters, and the Nebraska Second was discharged on their return home. A portion of the Sixth were quartered in the M. E. Church, at the head of Douglass street, some in barracks, which were erected at the mouth of Perry Creek, others at Cherokee, Peterson, and Spirit Lake. Cassaday's Hall was occupied as a hospital, and an unoccupied dwelling belonging to G. H. Shuster, on Pearl street, for headquarters. The warehouse of J. E. Booge, at the corner of Pearl and Fourth streets, was used as a government store house. The long and tedious winter months were whiled away by the monotonous roll call and drill. Occasionally some of the boys would show their weakness for the fat pigs, turkeys, chickens, &c., in the town and vicinity, which would create sometimes, considerable excitement, and not frequently the perpetrators of these hog-ish and fowl deeds, would be sent up to the county jail, which they denominated as the "Old Blue Bird," to pay the penalty of their crimes. Among the many who were sent up to the Old Blue Bird were some men of no ordinary ability, and rather literary turn of mind, one of whom occasionally attracted attention by an exhibition of his genius as an impromptu poet. His efforts in that line were commendable, and showed a mind, if properly cultivated, with application, which would give him a respectable position as one of the rhyming race. Below I subjoin one of his productions which appeared in the *Sioux City Register*, soon after it was penned.



Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.